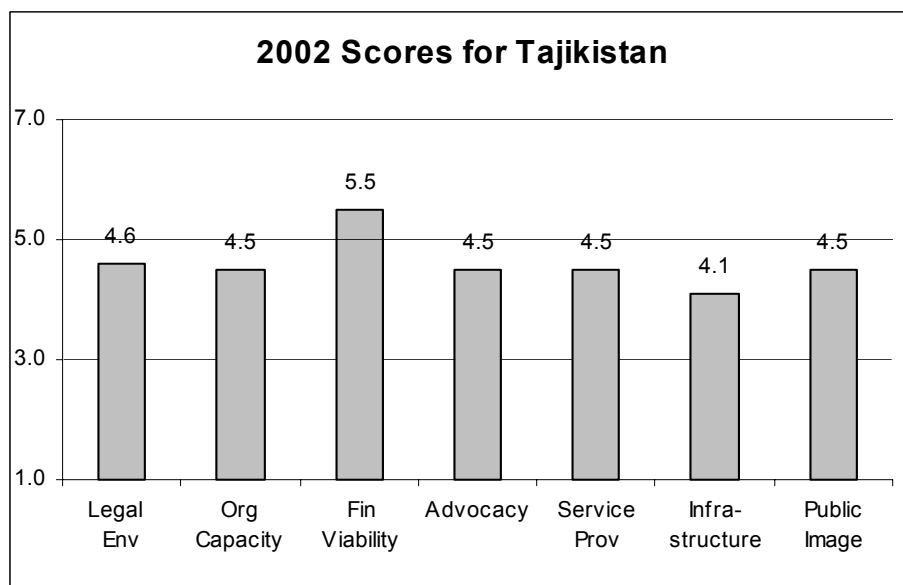


TAJIKISTAN



Capital:
Dushanbe

Polity:
Presidential

Population:
6,719,567

**GDP per capita
(PPP):** \$1,140

NGO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.6

Compared to 2001, the NGO sector in Tajikistan has shown marked improvement across the board. Sustainability scores

NGO SUSTAINABILITY

2002	4.6
2001	5.1
2000	5.4
1999	6.1
1998	6.6

across all seven dimensions of this year's Index reflected growth in the country's third sector. This broad improvement can be attributed to several factors, including an increased and more

rigorous donor presence in Tajikistan (facilitated by the improved security situation); the increasing interest, within that donor community, of engaging Tajik NGOs in reconstruction and reconciliation work; and the slow but steady maturation of "first generation" Tajik NGOs, who, through constant investments in training and technical assis-

tance, are helping to mold the third sector into a stable and professional partner for government and other sectors. Perhaps most importantly from the standpoint of local NGOs has been the quantum leap in government recognition enjoyed by the NGO sector. In a country with an authoritarian, "super-presidential" state, the main catalyst of this change was the participation of Tajik President Rakhmonov in an NGO conference on Social Partnerships in June 2002. This conference brought together several hundred NGO activists, international organizations, and a government delegation led by the President, and including several other ministers. The unprecedented participation by such a high-level government delegation signaled a welcome change in the government's attitudes towards NGOs, and has helped to trigger other improvements in the sector.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.6

The legal environment for Tajik NGOs continues to improve. In 2001, the government reduced the registration fees for NGOs from

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT	
2002	4.6
2001	4.8
2000	5.0
1999	6.0
1998	6.5

\$165 and \$240 for local and national NGOs, respectively, to \$25 and \$60, respectively. This has led to a doubling in the average number of new NGOs registered across Tajikistan, to approxi-

mately 400 per year. Furthermore, Tajikistan's NGO legislation remains fairly progressive, modeled after that of the Russian Federation.

Following the June 2002 Social Partnerships conference, there has been a marked reduction in the intensity and frequency of harassment by state bodies of Tajik NGOs. Following the public admonishment by the President to cooperate with NGOs, local authorities have reduced administrative impediments to NGOs' operations, not only in the capital city but in outlying regions as well. In an environment where the rule of law is generally fairly weak and informal and parallel channels of influence and control tend to dominate, this easing of state pressure on NGOs is largely the result of informal instructions – transmitted through state structures from the top and disseminated downward – not to create difficulties for NGOs. The momentum generated by President Rakhmonov's participation in the

Social Partnerships conference is actively being stoked and maintained by Tajik NGOs, who have found a potent tool in their ongoing efforts to educate, work with and cooperate with local government officials. The work of the Counterpart Consortium Civil Society Support Centers in Tajikistan has also contributed to this process, since they have, over the period of a number of years, been developing ongoing relationships with local officials in five regions of Tajikistan.

In terms of taxation of the NGO sector, the situation in Tajikistan presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, while grants are not taxed, the law does not distinguish between commercial enterprises and income-generating (but non-profit) activities by NGOs. This effectively serves to preclude any chances for financial self-sufficiency by NGOs, and ensures their continued dependence on foreign donors. Furthermore, the Tajik Tax Code does not recognize non-commercial organizations, and NGO employee salaries are thus taxed at normal commercial rates. The lack of a law on commercial activities by NGOs or a law governing the work of non-profit (charitable) organizations is required in order to clarify the status of revenue-generating NGOs and to specify a system of waivers and exemptions for them. Also worrying is the government's intention to introduce a tax of 0.5 percent of the credit portfolio on NGO microfinance activities.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.5

Organizational capacity of Tajik NGOs continues to be one of the weakest dimensions of the sector. Against a backdrop of persistent economic depression and a legislative environment that by and large does not recognize income generation by non-commercial organizations, Tajik NGOs are increasing their reliance on foreign donors.

This erodes Tajik NGOs' ability to conduct strategic planning and internal development in a fully autonomous manner, as NGOs are all too often obliged to modify their activities and/or structure to correspond to donor-defined priorities, both sectoral and geographical. Ironically, this to some extent has led to NGOs more actively seeking to build

**ORGANIZATIONAL
CAPACITY**

2002	4.5
2001	5.0
2000	5.5
1999	6.0
1998	6.0

constituencies for their initiatives. The desperate financial straits of most Tajik NGOs precludes strong internal development – most staff and organizations

are project-driven, and thus temporary. As a result, the concept of a functioning, empowered Board of Directors is poorly understood and not widely employed among the NGO community. Local NGOs tend to regard formally-appointed board members with suspicion, consistent with the accusation that they “contribute nothing, yet nevertheless demand control.”

Without wider acceptance of boards of directors, transparency, devolution and transfer of management are still rarities in the Tajik NGO community.

Very few successful coalitions of NGOs have emerged in Tajikistan. Large-scale, high-profile coalitions of leading NGOs almost inevitably collapse due to funding scarcities, internal organizational weakness, and conflicts between strong personalities leading to questions of ownership. Some grassroots coalitions, however, have managed to persevere, since these are generally driven by ground-up considerations, with considerable support from constituents.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.5

Tajikistan's economy remains one of the weakest in the former Soviet Union, and this fact fundamentally impacts the financial viability of the NGO sector. Local sources of

**FINANCIAL
VIABILITY**

2002	5.5
2001	6.0
2000	6.0
1999	7.0
1998	7.0

support for NGOs do exist, but they are, with few exceptions, in the form of labor and material. Monetary sources of local support are extremely rare. Through ongoing trainings provided

by international donor organizations and civil society programs, Tajik NGOs are generally increasing their knowledge of fundraising and membership outreach. However, the very real structural constraints imposed upon them by the weak economy mean that these investments still have not borne com-

mensurate fruit. Nevertheless, nascent financial management systems are beginning to appear in the more advanced Tajik NGOs.

Local support for NGOs, where it exists, tends to come in the form of in-kind goods and/or services. Volunteerism is quite high, reflecting an active population that is severely underemployed. There is almost no formal monetary support to Tajik NGOs from Tajik businesses, as the country's tax legislation does not provide exemptions or tax benefits to such charitable contributions. Financial viability of NGOs can thus only be achieved realistically through income generation. However, those NGOs that have successfully engaged in this (for example, by providing for-pay computer services or trainings) have encountered harassment and suspicion on the part of tax police.

ADVOCACY: 4.5

Cooperation between NGOs and local and central government officials in Tajikistan has improved remarkably following the conclusion of the conference on “Developing Social Partnerships” that was held in June in Dushanbe. The conference was groundbreaking for Central Asia, in that it included the personal participation of

ADVOCACY

2002	4.5
2001	5.0
2000	5.5
1999	6.0
1998	6.5

the President. Previously, although certain officials had exhibited a cooperative attitude towards NGOs, the overall attitude of the Tajik government towards the third sector was one of measured skepticism at best. Following President Rakhmonov’s public appeal to state officials to cooperate with NGOs, a distinct attitude shift seems to have taken place among the authorities. This has begun to slowly manifest itself at different levels of contact between the first and third sectors: in a more “open-door” attitude among local officials towards NGOs, increased willingness to participate in NGO-organized trainings, and increased participation in social sector

projects. It remains to be seen whether or not this new attitude will result in wider space for advocacy work. At the moment, NGO advocacy efforts continue to be weak and fairly rare – the exceptions being clustered around issues of immediate material interests to the NGOs themselves (registration procedures, state policies on women, etc.).

A small number of NGOs focused on legal issues such as NGO rights and taxation issues have emerged in Tajikistan. These organizations are, on the whole, quite professional, and have actively contributed to certain policy debates, in particular on issues of direct concern to the NGO community. However, there is an almost hermetic absence of NGO involvement in Tajikistan’s political life. Furthermore, legal NGOs in Tajikistan remain few and far between, and are unable to offer support to communities outside of one or two major cities.

SERVICE PROVISION: 4.5

The NGO sector in Tajikistan made significant strides in improving service provision this past year. Although the legal, advocacy

SERVICE PROVISION

2002	4.5
2001	5.0
2000	5.5
1999	5.5

and consultative spheres of service provision remain woefully under-served, Tajik NGOs nevertheless have begun to expand the range of goods and services they provide both to their constituencies and to their own members. In particular, an increasing number of NGOs have received training in and begun to manage microcredit programs, in order to spur small- and micro-enterprises in their neighborhood. Furthermore, an increasing focus by some donor agencies has catalyzed a community-

focused approach to many NGOs that were previously exclusively donor-focused.

Government recognition of the important services that NGOs can provide has strengthened in Tajikistan. In fact, in some ways there has been an over-reaction from the side of state officials, to the point where they resort to NGOs to fill material needs, in the belief that NGOs are better financed than the state. While this has further spurred NGOs to be responsive to the needs of this new “client,” it raises the disturbing specter of the state abandoning certain responsibilities entirely in the hope that NGOs will fill the gap. A striking example of this came in Khujent (Tajikistan’s second largest city), when the mayor invited local NGOs to a meeting, whereupon he asked them to donate batteries for the city’s garbage trucks.

Overall, while the range of goods and services provided by NGOs is slowly expanding, and these services generally are de-

mand-driven, cost recovery remains almost non-existent, due to the inability of NGOs' clients to pay for goods and services.

INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.1

A total of five Civil Society Support Centers (CSSCs) now serve Tajik civil society actors (including NGOs, CBOs, and others) in five regions of the country. Each of these centers offers training, organizational development

INFRASTRUCTURE

2002	4.1
2001	4.8
2000	5.0
1999	6.0

assistance, information and technical support. Efforts to integrate these centers into a nationwide network have begun – an important step,

since, if successful, it will set two precedents: both for successful local network development, and for institutionalizing and standardizing intermediate support organization standards for Tajikistan. In another encouraging sign, initial steps have been taken to begin training local grant review committees, with the ultimate goal of developing a local grant-making capacity among Tajik NGOs.

An increasing number of international donor organizations are funding civil society training programs, thus adding to the sup-

ply of trainings available to Tajik NGOs. However, demand continues to outstrip supply. This shortage has been acutely felt following the boom in NGO registration spurred by the reduction of registration fees by the Tajik government. The cumulative increase in the number of Tajik NGO activists who have undergone training, however, means that at least a rudimentary training capacity exists across the country. Previously, coalition-building was neither taught nor actively encouraged by foreign organizations funding civil society programs in Tajikistan. However, some efforts are now underway to train NGOs in the basics of forming coalitions, networking, etc. Nevertheless, horizontal links between NGOs remain very weak, reflecting the general weakness of the sector itself: most organizations are fully engaged in trying to stay afloat financially, leaving little time or effort for internal development, much less coalition-building. However, small territorial coalitions of 10 NGOs or less have emerged around specific issues, for example environmental concerns.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.5

The previous year has seen a quantum leap in the public image of Tajik NGOs. The image and perception of NGOs in society and by the government has changed markedly following the public participation of the

PUBLIC IMAGE

2002	4.5
2001	5.0
2000	5.0
1999	6.0
1998	7.0

President in an NGO Social Partnerships conference. This has led to increased coverage by the Tajik media (still dominated by state-run

outlets) in two ways. First, the state media at the national level now covers the activities of NGOs much more energetically. Secondly, the President's direct appeal to government officials to cooperate with NGOs has led to an increase in coverage of the third sector by local (regional) media, which are often under the direct or indirect control of local administrations.

The increase in media coverage of NGOs has corresponded with increasing understanding on the part of average citizens as

to what an NGO is. The general public's knowledge of NGOs is also increasing because of the increasing work of NGOs in community-level service-provision. Unfortunately, this may be leading to serious misperceptions concerning the third sector, as citizens come to overestimate the role and capacity of NGOs to solve social problems. In the public consciousness, NGOs are becoming seen as outlets for free services, or

merely the representatives of foreign donor organizations, thus contributing to the isolation of NGOs from Tajik society at large. For example, some local communities will not begin rehabilitation or construction projects until prompted to do so by NGOs or until foreign assistance is promised.